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ABSTRACT

Language is used to realize different intentions, and the patterns of wording that have evolved in language bear a natural relationship to the meanings they have evolved to express. Despite the diversity in the way texts (content) are encoded, they may be traced to the contexts in which they communicate meaning, indicating a form-function relationship. Language students need to study the features of context more closely and be made aware of the available wording options for encoding the text-context relationship. The systemic-functional model of language offers a means of organizing the many uses of language in a systematic manner and of showing how we use language to express meaning. It isolates the features of meaning in a context (field, mode, tenor, and purpose) and the kinds of meaning in wording (textual, interpersonal, and ideational). This allows teachers to understand better how text relates to context and helps them determine what to include in a communicative syllabus. (MSE)

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Text, Context and Language Teaching: A Systemic-Functional Perspective[1]

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(Paper presented at the 1987 TESOL CONFERENCE - MIAMI)

It is good to see this interest in the systemic-functional model (SFM) of language in relation to communicative language teaching (CLT) - a model most closely associated with Professor M.A.K. Halliday of the University of Sydney. In his plenary address at this conference, Peter Strevens has reminded us that we need ways to talk about language. This is especially true as we try new methods and materials to emphasize communication in the classroom. The way we view language generally bears some relation to models of language and inevitably shows up in our materials, methodologies and testing practices. It is appropriate then that we should consider the systemic-functional model of language, for it is above all a practical perspective - one that has many useful applications to our current needs as language teachers.

In this regard I wish to explore two closely connected subjects - the first serves to introduce the second: (1) the importance of the text - context relation to CLT, and (2) the utility of the SFM of language in exploring this relation.

Let me tell you what I mean by the terms text and context so that we can proceed together. What is text? It is, simply, anything that is spoken or written. Context is the extra-linguistic environment in which

1. This is a revised version of a paper originally presented at the 1986 JALT conference in Hamamatsu, Japan

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text is put to some use.[2] I hope to show you that it is relevant and timely to turn to a systemic-functional perspective on language because this model directly addresses the text - context relation and usefully describes how we communicate meaning.

PART I: TWO IMPLICATIONS

CLT is commonly concerned with the use of language in some context. We can consider two implications of the concept of language in use in some context in order to gain a better understanding of the systemic-functional perspective on the text - context relation.

The first implication has to do with purpose. In the early stages of the evolution of the communicative approach the concept of *function* as developed by Halliday was quickly pressed into service. His original conception (first fully described in 1973) equated *function* with the uses to which language is put. He wrote that for the very young child acquiring his first language, "'function' equals 'use'" (1974:98-99). He described some different uses of language in terms of what the child intended to accomplish with language: the instrumental, regulatory, interactional, personal, heuristic, imaginative and representational functions. It is important to note that Halliday described these functions <u>for the child</u>, not for the adult. I'll come back to this point.

The first implication then is that LANGUAGE IS USED TO REALIZE DIFFERENT INTENTIONS. In other words, there is purpose behind language

2. Context may also be analyzed usefully from a systemic-functional perspective as the textual environment in which words and groups of words function to convey meaning, but this subject is not taken up here.

use. The emphasis here is on the broad functions that language serves as speech acts between participants in some contextualized communication. Applying this implication to the text - context relation, we can readily intuit that text fulfills some purpose in a context.

This has its expression in CLT as well. In textbooks we find lists of uses for language with descriptions of the wording they require, often accompanied by suggestions for or dialogues of how the particular use might be realized in an appropriate or typical context. These uses are the intentions that language can realize and that we are to teach, such as agreeing and disagreeing, predicting, getting information, apologizing, and the like. An example of this might be 'seeking information' and we might find Tom and Jane and their foreign friend Ah Meng realizing this intention down at the train station.

But does this meet the needs of CLT and of our students to understand or in some manner internalize how language communicates meaning? The answer must be an emphatic "no", for these attempts to relate text and context saddle our students with a number of difficulties, which they should not have to experience.

The first of these is that such syllabuses and materials depend on subjective, unsystematic listings of uses. A comparison of textbooks addressing the functions of language can be interesting in this regard. A look through two popular and fairly recent textbooks yields these lists of functions (ordered as they appear in each book):

FIGURE 1: LISTS OF FUNCTIONS FROM TWO TEXTBOOKS

Writing for a Specific Purpose (McKay and Rosenthal)	Advanced Writing Skills (Arnold and Harmer)
inform/focus	advice and opinion
clarify	plans and arrangements
classify	permission
analyze	suggestions
assert/ substantiate	obligation
compare/contrast	generalizations
recommend	protest and complaint
agree/disagree	controversy
predict	contrast and comparison
the research paper	probability
	planning

Halliday has addressed this phenomenon:

> Language is used in a multitude of ways, for a multitude of purposes. It is not possible to try to enumerate them; nor is it necessary to try; there would be no way of preferring one list over another. These various ways of using language are sometimes referred to as 'functions of language'. (1978:186-187)

The SFM of language offers a way of organizing the myriad of uses of language in a systematic manner that is responsive to the linguistic code and how we actually use it to express meaning.

This leads us to the second implication of language in use: THE LANGUAGE CODE REFLECTS THE USES TO WHICH LANGUAGE IS PUT. In other words, the patterns of wording which have evolved in language bear a natural relation to the meanings they have evolved to express. As Halliday puts it:

> ...the multiplicity of function, if the idea is valid at all, is likely to be reflected somewhere in the internal organization of language itself. If language is, as it were, programmed to serve a variety of needs, then this should show up in some way in an investigation of linguistic structure (1973:105).

Applying this implication to the text - context relation we should expect and do find that we enjoy a remarkable degree of success in

predicting a context and a use for a particular wording and, conversely, suggesting the probable wording for a given context and language use. When we hear or read particular vocabulary items and grammatical structures in context, we can often successfully guess at the use to which language is being put and often the context as well. Conversely, in a familiar context and with some knowledge of the goals of language use, we can normally predict the kind of text, that is, wording, that is likely to be encoded.

Our students become able to do this as their ability to deploy the coding system of English grows to match their already well-developed potential to decode and encode non-verbal contextual features of meaning. Based on their native language experience our students are ready to link wording semantically to the various uses for which they are learning to employ English.

Give them a few sentences to read of the transcription of a conversation between a doctor and patient and ask them what language is being used for and what the context is. Alternatively, have them create the wording for an exchange between a shopkeeper and a customer seeking a particular product. This relation between text and context in terms of wording is most apparent in language which is highly contextualized, but it also operates in written and spoken modes of different genres encoded for different purposes, including academic discourse.

Unfortunately, ESL materials do not do justice to this intuition that there is a relation between the form and use of language. The second difficulty faced by our students is that the unsuccessful presentation of lists of uses of language is often accompanied by

equally subjective and unsystematic attempts to relate wording and function.

But then it is not an easy matter to match form and function without having recourse to an empirically based model directed at the uses of language. You can try it for yourself: consider what wording should be taught as the realization of a particular use of language, such as 'predicting'. What do you come up with? Would you be particularly surprised if different teachers and materials writers came up with different form - function combinations?[3]

I have compared the same two textbooks cited above to see how predictable the form - function relation is for 'predicting' in these two cases:

FIGURE 2: WORDING FOR THE FUNCTION OF PREDICTING IN TWO TEXTBOOKS

1. Advanced Writing Skills (Arnold and Harmer)
   will - won't *may - may not*
   be sure/bound to - be hardly likely to
   will probably - probably won't
   it is virtually certain that...
   there can be little likelihood...
   in all probability

2. Writing for a Specific Purpose (McKay & Rosenthal)
   I predict/believe... *it is possible/likely...*
   X will/should/might/may/could
   If...then (for possibility)

A comparison of more textbooks will yield the same result: some of the wordings are the same or similar, while others are very different in terms of grammatical class, structure and vocabulary. Additionally,

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3. Cf. G. Kennedy's work (1987) on the difficulties of identifying and selecting which linguistic devices should be taught as the expression of notions and functions. However, making selections based on frequency of use as he suggests begs the question of any underlying organization to the use of language as evidenced by a form - function relation. This is where the systemic-functional model of language comes into its own, for as Kennedy acknowledges: "... lists of wordings reveal systemic possibilities" (p. 77).

you can well imagine how many of the wordings I have quoted could readily contribute to other functions as well. There is no one to one correspondence between form and function for the adult, as there is for the very young child.

Halliday was referring to the young child when he wrote that "'function' equals 'use'". But we need to teach most of our students the adult language code. During the transition between child and adult system, the functional basis for language becomes more generalized and the one to one correspondence between form and function gives way to a lexicogrammatical system which mediates between semantic and formal realization of meaning. The adult system has been well characterized by Halliday in An Introduction to Functional Grammar (1985).

Without going into this any further, let me summarize much of what has happened in CLT with regard to the teaching of language in use as *functions*: it has being well-intentioned but ineffective and perhaps misleading. The uses of language have not been adequately dealt with nor has wording been successfully connected to these uses.

The most unfortunate result of the difficulty of settling on a list of functions and of text as wording for particular functions is that it has created a division within CLT. Numerous members of our profession have informed us of what CLT is and what it is not - notably Widdowson (1978), Rodgers (1983), Raimes (1983) and Brumfit (1984). Their writing has contributed to the formation of a dichotomy of terms and concepts all of which are relevant to CLT:

FIGURE 3: A DICHOTOMY OF TERMS

function	form
use	usage
fluency	accuracy
utterance	sentence
coherence	cohesion
performance	competence
interpersonal	ideational
extra-linguistic	linguistic
effectiveness	correctness
pragmatic	structural
discourse	text
context	lack of context

Most of us are aware of which list is supposed to characterize CLT. However, we cannot afford to write materials and teach them without breaking down this dichotomy and recognising the contribution of all the features that figure in language learning and teaching. The growing number of applications of the systemic-functional perspective[4] refutes the contention of Widdowson (1979:39 and 1983:28) and others that we cannot relate wording to use. CLT is in need of the theoretical and practical overhaul that the SFM of language can provide.

This overhaul can begin with careful consideration of the two implications of language in use I have just introduced to you. The first implication I offered is that LANGUAGE IS USED TO FULFILL DIFFERENT INTENTIONS. This led us to consider how text fulfills some purpose in a context. The second implication is that THE LANGUAGE CODE REFLECTS THE USES TO WHICH LANGUAGE IS PUT. This led us to consider how that patterns of wording are related to the meanings that are expressed in particular contexts for particular purposes. Both of these

4. Recommended readings that will serve to introduce the systemic-functional model of language and its applications include Butler (1985), Halliday and Hasan (1985) and Benson and Greaves (1985). Ragan (1987) gives an overview of the role of the SFM in CLT and an extensive application of it to the description of classroom discourse.

implications are basic to the SFM of language, which I will now proceed to introduce to you.

PART II: THE SYSTEMIC-FUNCTIONAL MODEL OF LANGUAGE

The SFM of language is based on a functional interpretation of language as choice. There is choice in the functions which language serves and there is choice in the wording available to realize these functions. It incorporates two concurrent interpretations of function: function as the use to which language is put in context, and function as the reflection of that use in the wording of text. This dual interpretation facilitates the relation of context and text which has otherwise eluded CLT.

How does the SFM describe context and text? A situational context can be described in terms of FIELD - what is taking place, in which language plays a part, MODE - what part, written or spoken, the language is playing in this activity, TENOR - who is taking part and the relationship between them, and PURPOSE - what language is being used to accomplish.

FIGURE 4: FEATURES OF MEANING IN A SITUATIONAL CONTEXT

FIELD - what is taking place
(the general activity going on
in which language plays a part)

MODE - what part language is playing in this
(written or spoken)

TENOR - who is taking part
(power & distance relations)

PURPOSE - what language is being used to accomplish

The SFM describes the wording of spoken and written texts as well as the situational context. Wording is linguistically described as encoding three kinds of meaning, referred to as meta-functions.

FIGURE 5: FEATURES OF MEANING IN WORDING

TEXTUAL -	MESSAGE focus of the clause encoded as thematic structure
INTERPERSONAL -	EXCHANGE in the clause encoded as mood structure
IDEATIONAL -	REPRESENTATION of reality (content) encoded as transitivity structure

The three kinds of meaning are TEXTUAL, INTERPERSONAL and IDEATIONAL. TEXTUAL MEANING is the message focus of the clause, encoded as thematic structure. INTERPERSONAL MEANING is the encoding of exchange in the clause as mood structure. IDEATIONAL MEANING is the representation of reality in the sense of content, encoded as transitivity structure.

They are called meta-functions because they form the basis for the semantic organization of all natural languages. They are derived from systems of choices available in the language code and are semantically related to the uses to which language is put in situational contexts (but not on a one to one basis!). They occur simultaneously in text, that is, the meaning of text is derived from the encoding of all three of these structures at the same time.

Let me illustrate the text - context relationship with an example of the procedural register. A set of instructions is highly contextualized and readily exemplifies this relation as such text often

involves using language to direct action within some environment. I have involved university students in Singapore in a task-based communicative language learning activity using procedural texts. They communicate sets of instructions to each other for the purpose of constructing a design using coloured, wooden blocks.

First, let's consider the features of meaning in this situational context:

FIGURE 6: AN ANALYSIS OF A SITUATIONAL CONTEXT

FIELD - CONSTRUCTING A BLOCK DESIGN

MODE - WRITTEN

TENOR - EXPERT/NOVICE OR TEACHER/STUDENT; CONSULTATIVE

PURPOSE - TO INSTRUCT IN THE PLACING OF BLOCKS

This shows the broad areas of meaning which exist in the context and are relevant to the use of language in this context.

Now let's go to the wording. Here are two clauses taken from the set of instructions which illustrate the functional nature of wording:

FIGURE 7: AN ANALYSIS OF WORDING IN TWO CLAUSES

1. *This design will have four sides.*

Theme	Rheme			(TEXTUAL)
Mood		Residue		(INTERPERSONAL)
Subject	Finite	Predicator	Complement	
participant	process		participant	(IDEATIONAL)

2. *Line up the red block against the right side of the white block.*

Theme	Rheme		(TEXTUAL)
Residue			(INTERPERSONAL)
Predicator	Complement	Adjunct	
process	participant	circumstance	(IDEATIONAL)

Textual meaning is encoded through thematic structure as the MESSAGE focus of the clause - the Theme is that part of the clause which encodes what the speaker/writer wants to tell the listener/reader about.

In the first example, the Theme is the nominal group *this design*. In an imperative clause, it encodes what the speaker or writer wants you to do. Thus in the second example, the Theme is the imperative verbal group *line up*. Theme is realized as the first ideational element of the clause. In terms of grammatical classes, Themes may be encoded as nominal groups, prepositional phrases, adverbials, and imperative verbal groups.

Interpersonal meaning is realized through mood structure as EXCHANGE between speaker/writer and listener/reader. This is the encoding of the four primary speech functions of offer, command, statement and question. The Mood function is encoded as Subjects and Finites (such as *did*, *can*, and *will*, the simple past and present of *be* and *have*, or an element fused with a Predicator such as *goes*). This is also where polarity - yes/no - and modality - the intermediate degrees between the positive and negative poles - are found.

In the first example above, we have a statement with the Mood function encoded as Subject and Finite - *this design will*. The second example is a command whose mood structure is encoded as the Residue function only, comprising a Predicator, Complement and Adjunct.

Ideational meaning is realized through transitivity structure as the REPRESENTATION of reality. This is what is usually understood as content. It encodes PROCESS - what is going on - as verbal groups, PARTICIPANTS in the process as nominal groups, and CIRCUMSTANCES

associated with the process as adverbial groups and prepositional phrases.

In the first example there are two participants, *this design* and *four blocks*, and the process *will have*. In the second example there is the process *line up*, a participant *the red block*, and the circumstance *against the right side of the white block*.

Now let's link text and context by relating features of meaning in the situation and the wording. I will do this in one of many ways open to us using the SFM of language: by analyzing the Themes in this set of instructions. The set of instructions, comprised of 25 sentences which lead to the construction of a rectangular design using 6 coloured blocks, is found in Appendix 1.

When we group the Themes of this text according to the ideational topics they refer to, some very interesting patterns emerge. These lead us back to the context in which this text is found. We can identify four topics for the Themes of the finite clauses in these 25 sentences: the topics of reader/writer, procedure, blocks, and design.

FIGURE 8: TOPICAL THEMES IN THE SET OF INSTRUCTIONS

READER/WRITER	PROCEDURE	BLOCKS	DESIGN
1. *you*			
			2. *this design*
			3. *the opp. side*
	4. *take*		
	5. *put*		
	6. *line up*		
	7. *place*		
	8. *take*		
	9. *put*		
	10. *take*		
	11. *place*		
	12. *take*		
	13. *line up*		
	14. *take*	14a. *which*	
	15. *place*		
		16. *one of its long sides*	
		17. *its short side*	
18. *let's*			
19. *we*			
		20. *the three blocks*	
		21. *the rem. three blocks*	
			22. *together*
			23. *its longest side*
			24. *its shortest side*
			25. *the design*

First, we can derive the situational context from this text. The purpose it is carrying out, to instruct in the placement of blocks, is seen in the wording. The wording is derived from the contributing features of register - field, mode, and tenor.

There is evidence for field in the lexical items *design, sides, take, put, line up, place, blocks,* and so on. That the mode is written can be seen in the simple clause structures which rely on nominal groups to convey much of the meaning.The distinctions between the spoken and written modes are fully elaqborated in Halliday's Spoken and Written Language (1985c). Tenor can be seen in the references to encoder and decoder in the Themes. The interpersonal relationship

between them can be seen in the mood structure encoded as clauses of command and statement.

Second, this pattern of Themes reveals the method of development of the text. There is an orientation section where the message focus is on the reader and the design as a whole in sentences 1 - 3. Next comes the mandatory procedural section: the grouping of procedural Themes as imperative process in sentences 4 - 15, and references to blocks in sentences 14, 16 and 17 in expansion of preceding procedure clauses. The completion of the instructions on how to place the 6 blocks occurs in sentence 17 and is followed by a recapitulation section where the message focus is on reader and writer in sentences 18 - 19, to blocks in sentences 20 - 21 and to the design again in sentences 22 - 25.

We can analyze mood and transitivity in similar ways. Further analysis using the SFM could be done to derive and compare other features of meaning (e.g., TEXTURE - the structural and cohesive features that characterize text in terms of INFORMATION STRUCTURE and FOCUS (GIVEN AND NEW) and COHESION). In this brief introduction, however, I have only done a limited thematic analysis to indicate the potential of the SFM to contribute to our understanding of the relation between text and context.

CONCLUSION

Let me now repeat the points I have made today. There are two major implications of language in use which are important to the relation between text and context and language teaching: (1) LANGUAGE IS USED TO REALIZE DIFFERENT INTENTIONS, that is, text fulfills some purpose in a context, and (2) THE LANGUAGE CODE REFLECTS THE PURPOSES

WHICH LANGUAGE SERVES, that is, the patterns of wording which have evolved in language bear a natural relation to the meanings they have evolved to express.

I then attempted to give you some insights into the utility of the SFM of language by looking briefly at some features of meaning of a context and the wording associated with it. I asserted that:

(1) There is a relation between form and function and text and context;
(2) Wording is multi-functional;
(3) The systemic-functional model of language helps to identify the options that mark the diversity of language; and
(4) The systemic-functional model of language provides evidence for the text - context relation and the multi-functional nature of language.

Despite the diversity evident in the way texts are encoded, texts may be traced and related to the contexts in which they communicate meaning. There is a form - function relation. Students need to study the features of context more closely and be made aware of the options available to them as wording that encode the text - context relation.

The multi-functional nature of wording is apparent and important.. It is possible, for example, to look at Themes and see features of mood and transitivity as well and <u>vice versa</u> because three kinds of meaning co-exist in the structure and lexis of language as message, interpersonal, and ideational meta-functions. The same lexical items in most cases encode or contribute to the encoding of more than one functional element in the grammar and thereby to the meaning of the text. This is an undeniable feature of language: grammatical structures and lexical items have more than one function in the realization of meaning. Awareness of this feature should guide our preparation of materials and syllabuses and be brought out by our communicative methodologies.

We see evidence in all texts for the remarkable diversity and creativity that mark language in use. The SFM of language helps to identify the options that contribute to this diversity. It provides evidence for the text - context relation and the multi-functional nature of language. CLT can benefit from applications of this model.

A more extensive systemic-functional analysis and comparison of texts by native speakers and ESL students of different levels of proficiency provides some important insights for communicative language teaching. Appendix 2: STUDENT TEXTS gives some examples of student-written texts and a limited analysis of their themes.

I am not suggesting that we teach language students systemic grammar. What we can do is to use the SFM of language to inform our understanding of the text - context relation for pedagogical purposes. We can identify which methods of development, which choices of thematic, mood, ideational and information structures and cohesive devices warrant our students' and our attention. This will ensure we do a better job of teaching language communicatively.

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APPENDIX 1: A SET OF INSTRUCTIONS

(1) You are going to make a design using coloured blocks.
(2) This design will have four sides.
(3) The opposite sides will be equal in length.
(4) Take one red and one white block.
(5) Put their long sides together so that they match up evenly.
(6) Line up the red block against the right side of the white block.
(7) Place them flat in the middle of the table with their short sides closest to you.
(8) Take a black block from the remaining unused blocks.
(9) Put one of its long sides against the sides of the white and red blocks closest to you.
(10) Take another white block from the unused blocks.
(11) Place one of its long sides against the side of the black block closest to you.
(12) Now take the remaining black block.
(13) Line up one of its long sides against the right side of the red block in your design.
(14) Now take the last block, which is yellow.
(15) Place it in the open right corner of your design.
(16) One of its long sides should be placed against the short sides of a black and a white block.
(17) Its short side farthest from you should be up against the short side of a black block.
(18) Now let's check your design.
(19) We will start from the farthest left corner of the design and proceed to the right.
(20) The three blocks, in order, are white, red, and black.
(21) The remaining three blocks are, from left to right, black over white, and then yellow.
(22) Together, these six blocks form a design with four sides.
(23) Its longest side is the length of two blocks.
(24) Its shortest side is the width of three blocks.
(25) The design is a red, white, black and yellow rectangle.

APPENDIX 2: STUDENT TEXTS

A More Proficient Student's Text

(1) 1. You vill nov make a rectangle whose opposite sides are equal in length vith the coloured blocks.
(2) 2. First, take a vhite and a red block and join the longer sides of the tvo blocks vith the red block on the right side of the vhite block.
(3) Put thea flat on the table.
(4) The vidth of the 2 blocks should have one side closest to you and one side farthest.
(5) 3. Then take a black block froa the reaaining of the coloured blocks and join its longer side to the right side of the red block, vhich is also the longer side of the red block.
(6) 4. Nov, take a yellov block froa the reaaining of the coloured blocks.
(7) Join the shorter side or vidth of the yellov block to the vidth of the black block that is closest to you.
(8) You vill nov have the yellov block directly belov the black block.
(9) 5. Finally, take the reaaining of the 2 coloured blocks, that is the vhite and the yellov blocks.
(10) Place the longer side of the black block directly belov the vidths of the yellov and red blocks that are closest to you.
(11) Then take the vhite block and join its longest side to the black vhich you have just put down.
(12) 6. Nov you vill have a rectangle vith its opposite sides equal.
(13) The rectangle is aade up of red, black, vhite and yellov blocks.

A Less Proficient Student's Text

(1) First, take the vhite block place along the long side of the red block in such a vay that the joining short side of the vhite and red block.
(2) Second, take the unuse black block place against the joining vidth side of the vhite and red block.
(3) Third, place the unuse vhite block long side against the black block.
(4) Then take the reaaining black block to place the long side against the red block.
(5) Finally, take the reaaining yellov block to placed in the eapty space to fora a four side rectangle shape vhich the short side is facing you.

TOPICAL THEMES IN A MORE PROFICIENT STUDENT'S TEXT

READER-WRITER	SEQUENCE	PROCEDURE	BLOCK	DESIGN
1. you				
	2. first			
		3. put		
			4. the vidth	
	5. then	5a. join	5b. vhich (rt.side)	
		6. take		
		7. join		
8. you				
	9. finally			
		10. place		
	11. then			
12. you				
				13. the rectangl

TOPICAL THEMES IN A LESS PROFICIENT STUDENT'S TEXT

READER-WRITER	SEQUENCE	PROCEDURE	BLOCK	DESIGN
	1. first			
		1. place		
			1. the ...short side	
	2. second	2a. place		
	3. third			
	4. then			
	5. finally			